



The Summer Work Student Exchange Program

Program Information Guide



The Summer Work Student Exchange Program

Program Information Guide

We are so excited that you have applied to participate in the Summer Work Student Exchange (SWSE) Program! We are looking forward to getting to know you better.

This ***Program Information Guide*** is here to provide you and your family with detailed information about the 2021 SWSE Program. This includes key dates and details about the upcoming interview and reference process and important information on our revised health and safety protocols for summer 2021.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact your Local Coordinator.

Who we are

The YMCA Summer Work Student Exchange (SWSE) program is a national exchange opportunity for 16- and 17-year-old youth living in Canada. Over six weeks during the summer, participants travel to another community in Canada, living and working in their second official language. Participants are employed in public sector or non-profit jobs, which provide meaningful employment experience and a chance to contribute to impactful work in communities across the country.

The YMCA of Greater Toronto has delivered the Program since 2007. Our program goals are to increase the understanding of Canada among Canadian youth. The program helps to develop second official language skills, deepen the appreciation of difference and diversity, and create possibilities for youth to gain valuable employment experience. SWSE is funded by [the Government of Canada](#), with partnership support from Via [Rail](#).



The Summer Work Student Exchange Program

Enhanced Health and Safety Protocols for 2021

YMCA staff have been busy developing several program alterations enhancing health and safety protocols in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic and in accordance with National, Provincial and Local Health Authorities. Elements of our plan include strategies to screen for COVID-19, reduce the risk of exposure and increase personal protection. We also ask and require all participants and hosts to agree to follow program protocols and commit to following local Public Health Directives for the Program's duration. Individuals must agree to follow program protocols to participate this year.

We will continue to share information as it becomes available, and are closely monitoring the Local, Provincial and National public health situation. We hope to run a program this summer and will make a final program viability determination in mid to late May. We will continue to monitor the situation and revise our plans in response to the safety needs of our participating communities.

Safety protocols in place for this summer include:

- Reduced participant to staff group size (From 1:10 down to 1:4)
- Implemented new safety protocols centered on *Personal Protective Equipment and Sanitization*
- Moved all staff hiring, training and work to virtual for the time being
- Shifted participant *Interview and Selection* process online
- Revised guidelines on *In-home Visits* to limit in person contact and mitigate risk
- Implemented a COVID-19 testing procedure for youth, host families and staff prior to travel at the beginning of the exchange.
- Revised *Summer Program Planning* with COVID-19 safety protocols in mind
- Revised *Travel Directives*



The Summer Work Student Exchange Program

The Selection Process

Purpose

The selection of participants and host families is of primary importance in ensuring the safety, well-being and overall enjoyment of the exchange experience for everyone involved. The Local Coordinator in your community will assess each applicant's eligibility through an interview and selection process.

Our staff will also evaluate the eligibility of host families through a multi-step interview process. All host family members must participate in our screening process, including an interview, a home visit, reference checks and security checks. These steps are integral in ensuring we are mitigating risk and protecting our youth participants.

This process happens in each community – so you can be assured that the process you undergo as a participant or as a host will be the same one that happens with youth and families in your twin community.

The Interview

The selection process will begin with a couple of virtual face-to-face meetings between the Local Coordinator in your community, the youth applicant, and their family (if hosting). Staff will set up meetings using Microsoft TEAMS as the online meeting platform. Participant and Family (Host) interviews will happen separately. Interviews will be around 45 – 60 minutes each. For youth whose families are unable to host, we conduct a brief interview with your guardians (10-15 minutes).



The Summer Work Student Exchange Program

Interviews are a time for everyone to get to know each other. Please come prepared with any questions you have about the program. We want you to feel as comfortable and informed as possible! There is no expectation that you take other steps to prepare for the interview unless communicated directly by your Local Coordinator.

Your Local Coordinator will arrange and set it up an interview over the phone or by e-mail. Please let us know if you have any challenges with an online virtual interview. Interviews can also take place over the phone. We are happy to work with you and your family to find an accessible digital interview format.

Family References for Hosts

For our participants' safety, every host family must provide three references to the Local Coordinator serving your community. A Reference should not be related to the family and must have known them for at least **three** years. Examples of suitable references include employers, coworkers, a family doctor, schoolteacher or principal, friend, etc. Reference checks are conducted with the utmost respect to the families and their privacy, and our intention is to ensure that the family will be a suitable host with the program. All family references will be called by the Local Coordinator serving your community.



The Summer Work Student Exchange Program

Host Security Check

As part of our screening process, all adults (18 years and above) in the household must undergo a criminal record check to host a visiting participant. To facilitate this, the Program uses a Security Consultant who partners with the Chateaugay Police Department. Individuals being screened are required to sign an Authorization form and provide clear copies of two pieces of ID (front and back). Directives for completing these forms and appropriate types of ID will be shared by your Local Coordinator. This check is based off the RCMP Canadian Criminal Records database. As per their requirements, the Authorization form and ID copies are held at the Chateaugay Police Department for two years as proof that the check was authorized. After this point, the documents are destroyed. The Program covers the cost of this screening.

Participant Employment Police Record Checks

Many of our employer partners require employees to provide a Canadian Police Information Check (CPIC). Youth participants have the option of the program completing this screening for them through our Security Consultant, but are not required to consent. If authorized, the screening is paid for by the program and delivered directly to the applicant prior to their first day of work. The check has no bearing on whether or not a participant is accepted into the program, and we will do our best to place youth who decline with an employer that does not require a CPIC. Two pieces of approved ID are required to complete this, along with a completed consent form. As with the Host Security Check, your Authorization and ID copies are held for two years by the Chateaugay Police Department.



The Summer Work Student Exchange Program

Home Visit

Before we are able to accept a host family into the program, an in-person home inspection is required. This part of the process helps to ensure that youth are placed in a safe host family. Your Local Coordinator will ask for a tour of your home, and will ask to see each room in the home.

‘Our staff conduct home inspections to note any potential hazards in the home, and as another method of mitigating risk and protecting our participants.

We have many guidelines in place to reduce COVID-19 risk during our home visits, including asking that only one family member accompany the staff, requiring that everyone present wear personal protective equipment, and that staff, youth and hosts complete a COVID-19 screening on the day of the visit. Visits will also depend on current health and safety directives from the local Health Authority. Staff will provide full details before this visit, including enhanced safety measures in light of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Paperwork

Before your initial meeting/interview with your Local Coordinator, you will receive an e-mail with the following documents:

- Photo and Video Release Form
- Host Family Reference Form
- Security Authorization Form for Hosts
- Security Authorization Form for Participants
- Independent Travel Form (*just in case)
- Participant Consent and Information Form
- COVID-19 Screening Consent Form



The Summer Work Student Exchange Program

Your Local Coordinator will explain each document before or during the interview and give instructions on collecting them back.

There will be other documents to complete after selection, including Personal Health Information Form. This information will help the Program make the necessary arrangements or accommodations to meet any specific needs you might have. It is essential to be honest in these documents, and we can assure confidentiality. Staff will provide further instructions following acceptance into the program.

*Independent Travel – that is, a youth participant travelling to or from the host community independently of the Program. If this is something you already anticipate – please don't hesitate to let your Local Coordinator know at the initial meeting/interview.

Pre-departure Sessions

A safe and enjoyable experience in the Program begins with good preparation. In June, we will organize Pre-departure sessions for participants and hosts to prepare everyone for the program. It is also a time to meet other families and participants and ask questions to our staff serving your community.

For summer 2021, these sessions will be a combination of virtual information sessions and outdoor team-building activities. We anticipate that these will occur in June pending Health Authority directives.

Some topics included:

- Program Overview
- Program Travel
- Working with an Employer, including workers' rights



The Summer Work Student Exchange Program

- Hosting a Guest and being a Guest
- Home Sickness
- Problem Solving
- Team Building

Travel

Travel across Canada is the experience of a lifetime! We arrange all transportation for participants with our staff team chaperoning the trip. We are developing enhanced health and safety measures for summer 2021 due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. We prefer all travel to occur with our team, but please let staff know as soon as possible if you want to request an exception.

Next Steps

Our staff team will continue to keep you updated on the selection process and timelines, including necessary ongoing changes in response to health directives. After the initial contact, you can expect the following:

- Communication from our staff around setting up an interview
- The required paperwork forwarded to you, and instructions on how to complete and return to us.
- Pending earlier selection steps, an in person home visit.
- Ongoing communication with Local Coordinator to address any questions or concerns



The Summer Work Student Exchange Program

If You Are Selected

If you are selected to participate this summer, you will receive notice as soon as possible. You will then receive additional information to prepare you for your experience, including:

- Pre-departure session information and dates/times (May)
- Information on your destination and host (June)
- Information on your Employment position (June)
- Information about your travel plans to your host community!

General Program Timeline

As we move forward with your application and prepare for the summer, there are important dates to consider:

Program Element	Timelines
Interviews /In-Home Visits	These will start in most communities in April and will be booked until Mid-May, with a few additional interviews occurring in late May if required.
Participant Selection	Selection will occur between mid and late May. Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Interview- References- Security Check- Home visit for hosts
Twinning (Matching with a Host)	Twinning is the process of matching accepted applicants with a host in their exchange community, and will occur the last week of May.
Pre-departure Session(s)	We will host pre-departure sessions in your community between Early and Mid-June
Travel to Host Community	The primary travel day will be Saturday, July 24 th . Note: some communities may travel on a different day, but you will be informed after the twinning process occurs.
First Day of Work	Most participants start work on Monday, July 26 th
Last Day of Work	Most participants will end their work placements on August 20 th
Return Travel Dates	Return travel will be on Saturday, August 21 st , or Sunday, August 22 nd .